Utilize Experts You Work with Every Day
To Keep Students Learning After Class

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It most of the students at your college are commuters, it’s a challenge to keep them on campus and to encourage them to blend their interdisciplinary knowledge.

How can isolated, academic lectures transcend the classroom and become applicable and relevant to students’ every day lives? With hiring freezes and travel budget cuts commonplace because of the economic downturn, achieving these goals with little or no funding is a difficult proposition.

One solution is to tap the expertise and knowledge that already exists on campus. We’re doing that with our Knowledge is Power lecture series.

Nearly 200 people attended the first of Collin College’s Knowledge is Power lecture, entitled “At the Root of It: Stem Cells and Society.” Students, faculty and community members learned about the development of stem cells, the latest research and the history of the ongoing debate. Attendees discovered that all stem cells are not equal and began to ask a variety of valid and important questions, such as: When does life begin? How can adult stem cells be used? Should one’s life be sacrificed to save many?

Gentled from casual conversation, the Knowledge is Power series is intended to provide forums where individuals can expand their knowledge of current issues and make informed decisions on America’s public policies.

We believe that we have a wealth of resources, in the form of professors with paramount teaching skills and research credentials, just waiting to be accessed. Professors are a veritable source of information as well as very good speakers who can present in-depth information with clarity and substance.

What makes this grassroots lecture series different is that it is driven by college professors. In our model, two professors present a topic from their own disciplines for 25 minutes each. That’s followed by a question and answer session. Our topics vary, but they align with national trends.

Subsequent lectures included HIV, which combined microbiology and history; autism, blending biology and child development; biofuels, blending chemistry and political science; global warming, combining geology and government; and depression, bringing together sociology and psychology.

In our informal and informal sessions, professors have creative freedom with their presentations and can work independently or with their co-lecturer.

What we’ve been doing is guiding us in devising the lecture series.

Simplicity is a key component to the success of our seminar.

We were careful to keep the same format — 1 to 2:15 p.m. We made the lectures relatively brief and convenient for students and professors. We hold each seminar in the same location. Our event promotion consists of e-mailed electronic flyers and a press release.

We avoided the typical red tape that comes with instituting a new initiative and did not get sucked into an abyss of 17 committee meetings. We have a two-person committee: one biology professor and one history professor. We have offices across the hall from each other and bounce our ideas back and forth as they come to us. There is no budget and no fundraising committee. And we can do the work within our schedules.

We procure our speakers and topics with professors in casual, hallway conversations or via e-mail or phone. We ask professors who are passionate about certain topics if they will share their knowledge, and we are approached by professors with their own ideas. The best part is that we are never at a loss for topics or professors, which ensures the continued growth of the program.

Our biggest challenge was probably the initial effort involved in putting the idea in motion. Those brilliant ideas that you think about off-and-on for years are not so brilliant if you never act on them. Follow the Nike slogan: “Just Do It.”

If you have an availability problem with a professor, be flexible and change disciplines; most topics can be addressed from multiple angles.

All institutions are interested in quantifiable results. We have been pleasantly surprised to find that the Knowledge is Power lectures are always packed. In addition, professors are learning from professors in other disciplines. They have told us that their students are asking interdisciplinary questions relating to recent seminars. Professors are also using sections of their colleagues’ Knowledge is Power PowerPoint presentations to enhance their own courses.

Hindsight is 20-20. We wish we would have started taping the seminars to create a library from the inception of the series. It is wise to anticipate lively dialogue with a trend-topic series. As long as the discussion is constructive, we embrace and encourage it.

For us, Knowledge is Power was the classic win-win situation. Not only are professors and students gleaming new information, but students learn that intelligent people are knowledgeable about many different topics. In addition, we believe that it is good for students to view their professors as experts outside of the classroom.

Often the best ideas are the simplest ones that utilize readily available resources and stem from a passion that is motivating and shared by many. In our case, it is a true love of education. It has been easy for us to offer the seminar series because we have a lot of people willing to help us. In these trying economic times, getting a little extra knowledge without paying for it goes a long way.